

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEL AV 01827 01 OF 02 291241Z

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6083

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 1827

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (INFO ADDRESSEES OMITTED ON ORIGINAL)

E O 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, XF, IS, EG, US

SUBJECT: SUSPENSION OF NEGOTIATIONS: INITIAL ISRAELI REACTIONS

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING SUSPENSION OF EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS, GOI IMMEDIATELY BEGAN INTENSIVE EFFORT TO EXPLAIN AND JUSTIFY ISRAEL'S DECISION TO ITS OWN AND FOREIGN PUBLIC, EMPHASIZED NEED FOR KEEPING NEGOTIATING OPTIONS OPEN SOMEHOW, AND TRIED TO REASSURE ISRAELIS THAT CONTINUITY OF U.S./ISRAELI "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" HAD NOT BEEN IMPAIRED. ISRAELI PUBLIC HAS GIVEN STRONG BACKING TO GOI POSITION AND CONFIDENCE IN RABIN'S LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN ENHANCED. AT SAME TIME, FUTURE OF US/ISRAELI RELATIONS HAS BECOME MATTER OF OVERRIDING CONCERN. PRIMIN AND CABINET ASSOCIATES PUBLICLY HAVE REAFFIRMED CONFIDENCE INCLOSENESS OF US/ISRAEL TIES AND HAVE DECLINED TO SPECULATE ON ISSUES OF US AID LEVELS AND POLITICAL SUPPORT. MEDIA HOWEVER HAS FANNED PUBLIC ANXIETIES AND IT IS CLEAR IN OUR PRIVATE CONVER-

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 01827 01 OF 02 291241Z

SATIONS THAT INFLUENTIAL ISRAELIS ARE DEEPLY WORRIED. IN

INTERNATIONAL ARENA, ISRAELIS ARE BEGINNING TO REALIZE THEY FACE HARD DECISIONS, WITH CONSIDERABLE UNCERTAINTY AS TO WHETHER STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH MAY YET BE SALVAGEABLE (INCLUDING ANOTHER JERUSALEM-CAIRO SHUTTLE IN NEAR FUTURE) OR WHETHER GENEVA CONFERENCE, INCLUDING PAINFUL PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION ISSUE MUST NOW BE FACED. INCREASED EMPHASIS ON MILITARY PREPAREDNESS CAN BE EXPECTED: THOUGHT IS BEING GIVEN TO PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH RENEWAL OF UNEF/UNDOF MANDATES AND POSSIBILITY THAT ARAB STATES MAY BE CONSIDERING MILITARY OPTIONS. DESPITE MOMENTARY UNITY OF PARTIES IN SUPPORT OF GOI POSITION, RABIN HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE HAS INTENTION OF FORMING NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. ISRAELI MOOD-- RIGHT AFTER SUSPENSION OF NEGOTIATIONS, ISRAELIS MOMENTARILY FELT WAVE OF RELIEF THAT HARD DECISION FOR WITHDRAWAL HAD BEEN PUT OFF. SENSE OF DISAPPOINTMENT WAS INITIALLY OFFSET BY MIXTURE OF PRIDE AND SATISFACTION THAT GOI HAD STOOD UP AGAINST EGYPTIAN DEMANDS AND RESISTED U.S. "PRESSURE." IN FOLLOWING DAYS, HOWEVER, MOOD TURNED SOMEWHAT MORE SOBER AS ISRAELIS BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT UNCERTAINTIES REGARDING THE FUTURE HAD ACTUALLY INCREASED, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S., AND THAT SUSPENSION OF TALKS HAS NOT RESOLVED BASIC PROBLEMS OF ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE. AWARENESS OF INCREASED POSSIBILITY OF NEW WAR WITH LIKELIHOOD OF HEAVY CASUALTIES HAS CREATED SOME UNDERCURRENTS OF ANXIETY.

3. DOMESTIC SCENE. IN EXCEPTIONAL SHOW OF UNITY, GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION VOTED TOGETHER IN KNESSET THIS WEEK TO PIN BLAME FOR COLLAPSE OF NEGOTIATIONS ON EGYPT. RABIN AND PERES THEN LAUNCHED EXTENSIVE HOMEFRONT CAMPAIGN TO EXPLAIN GOVERNMENT'S CASE TO PUBLIC, EMPHASIZING THAT NEGOTIATING TEAM HAD GONE BEYOND ITS ORIGINAL MANDATE IN READINESS TO MAKE CONCESSIONS FOR SAKE OF U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS. OPINION POLLS SHOW THAT PUBLIC HAS RALLIED FIRMLY BEHIND GOVERNMENT AND HAS MORE CONFIDENCE IN RABIN'S LEADERSHIP, LEADING SOME LABOR PARTY MODERATES INCLUDING ONE MINISTER TO CONCLUDE THAT PRIME MINISTER CAN NOW AFFORD TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE AND WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY GREATER PORTION OF PUBLIC WITH HIM WHEN NEW NEGOTIATING OPPORTUNITY DEVELOPS. (HE SEEMED TO THINK A NEW

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEL AV 01827 01 OF 02 291241Z

SHUTTLE WAS IN THE CARDS.) THE MINISTER INSISTED THAT THIS SITUATION WAS NOT OUTCOME OF ANY INTENTIONAL DESIGN ON PART OF GOI TO SABOTAGE NEGOTIATIONS, BUT RATHER CONSEQUENCE OF GOI'S FIRMNESS IN REJECTING WHAT IT REGARDED AS UNACCEPTABLE TERMS. DESPITE UNITY UNDER STRESS, LATEST EVENTS DO NOT SIGNAL ANY BASIC CHANGE IN DOMESTIC POLITICAL POWER RELATIONS OR POLICIES OF PARTIES. LABOR ALIGNMENT LEADERS HAVE MOVED RAPIDLY TO SQUELCH TALK OF NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT, CONCERNED

THAT NEITHER DOMESTIC PUBLIC NOR USG SHOULD REACH MISLEADING CONCLUSION THAT ISRAELI POLICY HAS SHIFTED IN DIRECTION OF HARDLINE OPPOSITION LIKUD. BASIC DIFFERENCE IN APPROACH BETWEEN TWO CAMPS ALSO HAS BEEN UNDERSCORED BY LIKUD AND NRP HARD-LINERS' (AND THEIR NUMEROUS SUPPORTERS) DEEP SATISFACTION WITH SUSPENSION OF NEGOTIATIONS, AND THEIR CONVICTION THAT ISRAEL'S POLITICAL SITUATION ACTUALLY HAS IMPROVED.

4. US-ISRAELI RELATIONS. FUTURE OF RELATIONS WITH USG HAS EMERGED AS MAJOR ISSUE OF THE DAY. GOVERNMENT LEADERS HAVE TRIED PUBLICLY TO REASSURE ISRAELIS ABOUT STRENGTH OF TIES WITH U.S., WHILE PRIVATELY ADMITTING THEIR DEEP CONCERN. RABIN THIS WEEK REPEATEDLY REAFFIRMED HIS CONFIDENCE IN CONTINUITY OF "U.S.-ISRAELI SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP," SHARPLY CRITICIZED ISRAELI MEDIA FOR LEAKING PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE (HE SAID MEDIA REPORTS WERE INEXACT, EXAGGERATED AND OUT OF CONTEXT) AND REFUSED TO SPECULATE ON IMPLICATIONS OF U.S. MID EAST POLICY REASSESSMENT. DESPITE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENTS, WE HAVE HEARD EXTENSIVE CRITICISM THAT PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE TO GOI DURING CRITICAL PERIOD OF NEGOTIATIONS HAD POWERFUL COUNTERPRODUCTIVE EFFECT. MEDIA, PARTICULARLY WASHINGTON REPORTS, HAS FUELED PUBLIC ANXIETIES THAT U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIPS ARE ON VERGE OF SERIOUS CRISIS, INVOLVING POSSIBLE REDUCTION OF AID AND LOSS OF U.S. SUPPORT IN INTERNATIONAL ARENA. WHILE GOI LEADERS HAVE PRAISED SECRETARY FOR HIS CONDUCT OF NEGOTIATION, A NUMBER OF COMMENTATORS HAVE CHARGED HIM WITH PRO-EGYPTIAN BIAS. WE HAVE ALSO HEARD SOME ISRAELIS CRITICIZE U.S. HANDLING OF NEGOTIATIONS ON GROUNDS THAT U.S. WAS NOT SUFFICIENTLY WILLING TO BALANCE EGYPT'S INADEQUATE CONCESSIONS BY OFFERING SUBSTANTIAL U.S. MATERIEL AND POLITICAL OFFSETS. THERE HAVE BEEN CALLS FOR NEW STEPPED-UP INFORMATION CAMPAIGN IN U.S. AND RECOMMENDATIONS THAT SENIOR GOI LEADERS VISIT WASHINGTON IN NEAR FUTURE TO REPAIR DAMAGE.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 TEL AV 01827 01 OF 02 291241Z

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 01827 02 OF 02 291006Z

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 1827

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5. ARAB-ISRAELI RELATIONS. NEITHER THE NEGOTIATIONS NOR THEIR SUSPENSION HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY ALTERED ISRAELI PERCEPTIONS OF NATURE OF ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE. WITH EXCEPTION OF RELATIVELY INCONSEQUENTIAL PARTIES OF THE FAR LEFT, NO POLITICAL FIGURES AT THIS POINT ARE ASKING PUBLICLY WHETHER PREMISES OF ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY MAY NEED REASSESSMENT. IF ANYTHING, MOST ISRAELIS ARE MORE FIRMLY CONVINCED THAN EVER THAT FAULT HAS BEEN BASICALLY WITH ARAB STATES WHICH ARE NOT INTERESTED IN MOVING TOWARDS NEGOTIATED PEACE SETTLEMENTS, BUT ONLY IN FORCING ISRAELI UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORY. ANTI-EGYPTIAN FEELING IS RUNNING HIGH AT PRESENT, WITH MOST OF PUBLIC PERSUADED THAT SADAT INTENTIONALLY SABOTAGED NEGOTIATIONS BY HARDENING HIS TERMS IN LAST TWO WEEKS, THUS PUTTING ISRAEL IN NO-WIN POSITION OF EITHER ACCEPTING EGYPTIAN "DICTATE" OR FINDING ITSELF IN CRISIS WITH U.S.

6. ISRAELI POLICY. DESPITE THIS BASICALLY PESSIMISTIC ASSESSMENT, GOI LEADERS AS WELL AS MEDIA HAVE ALREADY URGED NEW DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES TO PREVENT SUSPENSION OF NEGOTIATIONS FROM TURNING INTO PERMANENT DEADLOCK. SOME POLITICIANS HAVE CALLED ON GOI TO SEIZE OCCASION TO FORMULATE MAJOR NEW PEACE INITIATIVES. THERE IS SOME SPECULATION THAT BILATERAL EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI AGREEMENT UNDER U.S. AUSPICES MAY STILL BE POSSIBLE AFTER INTERVAL OF TIME. FOR SOME REASON UNKNOWN TO US, ISRAELIS DO NOT RPT NOT APPEAR TO EXCLUDE ANOTHER JERUSALEM-CAIRO SHUTTLE IN NEAR FUTURE. MOST COMMENTATORS BELIEVE GOI MUST NOW GET READY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEL AV 01827 02 OF 02 291006Z

FOR GENEVA CONFERENCE, WHILE A FEW VOICES HAVE ALREADY REMINDED ISRAELIS THAT THIS WILL INVOLVE FACING DIVISIVE AND HEATED PALESTINIAN ISSUE, BEGINNING WITH PLO REPRESENTATION QUESTION.

7. MILITARY PREPAREDNESS. IN ADDITION TO FACING POLITICAL CHALLENGES, ISRAELIS REMAIN ATTENTIVE TO THEIR SECURITY SITUATION UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES OF HEIGHTENED TENSION. UPCOMING EXPIRATION DATES OF UNEF AND UNDOF MANDATES ARE

BEGINNING TO FOCUS IDF ATTENTION ON ARAB MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS, AND MAY CONCEIVABLY INVOLVE LIMITED OR GREATER ISRAELI MOBILIZATION CALLS, SUCH AS ACCOMPANIED PERIOD PRECEDING LAST UNDOF RENEWAL IN NOVEMBER, 1974.

8. PERCEPTION OF ISRAEL'S SITUATION. AT THIS POINT, ISRAELI ASSESSMENT OF NEXT STEPS HAS BARELY BEGUN. ASIDE FROM BLAMING THE ARABA, ISRAELIS NOW ARE FOCUSSED ON WHAT THEY SEE AS AN INFORMATION PROBLEM-- HOW TO MAKE THEIR CASES MORE CONVINCING. THEY ARE ALSO LOOKING FOR SCAPEGOATS: FOR EXAMPLE, PRIMIN IS ANGRY WITH THE MEDIA: THE MEDIA ACCUSES WASHINGTON EMBASSY: SOME ISRAELIS ARE ANGRY WITH PRESIDENT FORD AND THE SECRETARY. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT IN WEEKS AHEAD ISRAELIS WILL BEGIN RECONSIDERING THEIR POLITICAL FUTURE IN SOMEWHAT GREATER DEPTH. WHETHER ANY SIGNIFICANT NEW APPROACH EMERGES FROM THAT RE-EXAMINATION REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, NEGOTIATIONS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, PEACE TALKS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TELAV01827
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750110-0592
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975034/aaaaacyz.tel
Line Count: 241
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 JUN 2003 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <17 JUN 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SUSPENSION OF NEGOTIATIONS: INITIAL ISRAELI REACTIONS
TAGS: PFOR, XF, IS, EG, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006